

FOLIC ACID SUPPLEMENTATION

Folic acid is one of the "B" vitamins required for general health. Recent scientific information has confirmed that folic acid is very important for a healthy pregnancy. It helps to prevent serious defects of the **central nervous system** called neural tube defects. These defects include anencephaly (failure of development of the top half of the brain), and spina bifida (failure of closure of part of the spinal canal). Spina Bifida is number one disabling birth defect occurring in one in 750 babies.

Dose and Timing

The use of folic acid supplementation, in a dose of 0.4 to 1.0 mg per day, has been proven to reduce the risk of these problems by 50%. Spina bifida and other neural tube defects occur between the 3rd and 4th week of pregnancy, before some pregnancies are confirmed. This is the reason the beneficial effect of folic acid has been demonstrated when it is **taken prior to pregnancy and for the first 4 to 6 weeks** of pregnancy. King Saud University Hospital recommends that **ALL** women of childbearing age take folic acid every day in order to help prevent neural tube defects. This is important for any women not practicing birth control but especially important for women who are actively trying to conceive (attending a fertility clinic).

Sources

Although folic acid is found in many vegetable, fruits, grain products, meats and meat alternatives, it is difficult to get the entire amount from food because much of it is lost during storage, preparation and cooking. Eating more green and raw vegetables, fruit, lentils, beans and nuts can optimize the amount of folic acid obtained from food. If vegetables are cooked, they should be steamed, micro waved or boiled as little as possible.

Some sample foods containing folic acid are listed below.

Asparagus	250 ml	0.176 mg
Beans	250 ml	0.15 mg
Broccoli	1 spear	0.123 mg
Orange Juice	250 ml	0.109 mg
Lentils (cooked)	250 ml	0.358 mg
Peanuts	125 ml	0.081 mg
Sunflower Seeds	125 ml	0.15 mg
All Bran Cereal	125 ml	0.043 mg
Whole Wheat Bread	3 slices	0.075 mg
Chicken Liver (cooked)	85 gm	0.655 mg
Spinach (cooked)	250 ml	0.262 mg
Peas (frozen)	250 ml	0.094 mg

However to ensure the required daily intake is obtained, it is recommended that a supplement which contains 0.4 to 1.0 mg be taken every day. Taking more than 1.0 mg is not recommended. This amount of folic acid is found in folic acid tablets, most prenatal vitamins and some multivitamins (but you have to read the label).